

Coping Strategies to Help Keep Holiday Rush from Becoming 'Holiday Blues'

The holiday season can be stressful for many people. Often it's the stress of trying to live up to unrealistic expectations.

Many factors can take their toll on emotional well being: rushing around; attending to extra social obligations; being alone; spending too much money; or overindulging in food and drink.

The California Department of Consumer Affairs has tips on dealing with the holiday blues, and advice for consumers who may need to seek professional help. The Department's Board of Psychology licenses psychologists, while the Board of Behavioral Sciences licenses clinical social workers, and marriage and family therapists.

Experts say coping with the holidays starts with simply being aware of your expectations, both for yourself and for friends and family.

"It's an illusion that everyone's holidays are perfect. You may not be able to relive past holidays or create the 'perfect' holiday season," explains Jacqueline Horn, Ph.D., president of the California Board of Psychology.

"But the holiday blues are usually short-lived and should pass. If you don't feel better soon after the holiday season is over, you may want to seek professional help."

Dr. Horn, a practicing clinical psychologist and lecturer for the UC Davis Department of Psychology, says even those who are isolated and have no support group can brighten their holidays by going out in public. They can go to the mall, attend no-cost or low-cost community events, or volunteer their time to help others during the holidays.

Since days are shorter and the hours of darkness longer, another way to keep the blues at bay is to simply get some sunlight with a daytime activity, experts say.

Following are some tips from psychologists on how to cope with holiday stress:

TIPS TO HELP HANDLE THE HOLIDAYS

- Set realistic goals for yourself.
- Find time for yourself.
- Volunteer to do something for others.
- Let go of the past. Approach the holidays with a fresh outlook and try something new.
- Don't over-indulge by drinking or eating too much.
- Spend time with people who are supportive.
- Get your sleep.
- Get some exercise.
- Connect with your community.



DEALING WITH HOLIDAY BLUES

- ▶ **Set realistic goals**
- ▶ **Try something new**
- ▶ **Connect with community**

However, if your typical coping skills are ineffective and you become overwhelmed by stress, anxiety or depression, it may be a sign that you should consider seeking professional help. Other warning signs include:

- Weight loss or gain
- Thoughts of suicide
- Feelings of worthlessness
- Difficulty thinking or concentrating
- Difficulty sleeping or increased sleeping
- Depression symptoms lasting more than two weeks

If you think you need professional help, start by getting a referral for a qualified therapist from friends, family members, clergy or your physician. Consumers should confirm a therapist is licensed so they meet the professional standards set by the state. Also check that the license is in good standing.

The California Department of Consumer Affairs licenses thousands of professionals who can help. To check license status or get more information, visit the Psychology Board Web site at www.psychboard.ca.gov or the Board of Behavioral Sciences site at www.bbs.ca.gov. Psychiatrists are medical doctors licensed by the Medical Board of California, www.medbd.ca.gov.

For more holiday consumer tips, check the Department of Consumer Affairs Web site at www.dca.ca.gov.

Consumers can also call the Department of Consumer Affairs toll-free at (800) 952-5210.

For more [holiday consumer tips](http://www.consumer.ca.gov), visit the California Department of Consumer Affairs Web site at www.consumer.ca.gov.

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